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SUBJECT: IRAQI POLITICOS TRAINED ON CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES IN BAGHDAD

(U) This message is Sensitive but Unclassified - not for Internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The International Republican Institute (IRI) has expanded its candidate-training program in Iraq to include sessions in Baghdad. IRI is providing political party training to 43 parties competing for seats in the Iraqi provincial council elections scheduled for January 31, 2009. In addition to party training, IRI offers modules for groups of individual candidates. While the majority of training sessions are hosted at IRI's training center in Erbil, the Institute has recognized the improving security situation in Baghdad and begun hosting modules in Baghdad for the first time since early 2007. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 11 POLOFFS attended a multi-party training session co-hosted by Baghdad PRT and IRI. This was the second such event; the first was held on November 11. A total of 18 candidates, representing nine political entities, attended the two-day seminar. The IRI instructor, a US citizen with professional experience working on congressional and presidential campaigns, worked with an Iraqi interpreter to guide participants through an interactive lesson focusing on campaign strategies and techniques.

¶3. (SBU) Baghdad PRT took the lead in organizing and hosting the training sessions, following a presentation to the PRT by on the upcoming provincial elections. PRT staff approached the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) with information that many local candidates were interested in participating in training sessions, and offered to provide a local venue for IRI to conduct courses. Following a positive response from IRI, the PRT, in cooperation with the Embassy Political Section, publicized the events to all parties active within their area of operations.

¶4. (SBU) The basic, multi-party candidate training module introduced candidates to generic themes and concepts such as targeting undecided voters and maintaining a simple database. Candidates also participated in discussions on party platform development, constituent services, and voter outreach. Candidates and parties that participated in these modules may apply to enroll in more focused, party-specific training courses at IRI's Iraq headquarters in Erbil. Candidates from several parties told poloffs during a break in the training that they found the sessions very useful; much of the thinking was new, they commented. Several of the candidates who participated in the training have inquired about training opportunities for others in their party. (Note: We routinely pass these requests on to NDI and IRI. End note.)

¶5. (SBU) Comment: IRI and its counterpart, NDI, moved their Iraq headquarters from Baghdad to Erbil in 2007, citing security concerns. While both institutes continue to provide the bulk of their party and candidate

development training in Erbil, they have each made a commitment to relocate elements of their international staff to Baghdad in early 2009. NDI is setting up a larger operation in the International Zone although they face space availability problems. We continue to encourage increased IRI and NDI programming in Baghdad. The two candidate-training courses offered by IRI in Baghdad are a sign that IRI is prepared and able to make this move.

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